



Work from home upgrades

Stay hydrated: Fressko's stylish Rise bottles multitask, like you. The reusable Borosilicate glass bottle has an infuser for tea or to add fruit to flavor your water. \$29.95, madebyfressko.com (Fressko)

Work from home master class: 4 Chicago WFH veterans give tips, talk perks

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Working from home sounded great when you could do it occasionally, but now just about everyone is in full-blown WFH mode amid the spread of the coronavirus.

We know what's playing out at home. You, your spouse and kids are all calling dibs on the kitchen table to work, and with everyone using the Wi-Fi, it's slower than dial-up. In a few days it's going to be a Lord of the Flies situation.

If you're lucky enough to work from home all the time, you've got it down. But if you're a newbie, working from home can be fraught with challenges. There's no tech support down the hall, and there's no chatting up your colleague when you're bored. If you live alone, your place might be quieter than a meditation retreat, but if you and the fam are stuck inside, it might be louder than a rock concert. Remain calm.

Carrie Lannon, a communication and branding consultant who lives in the Lakeshore East

neighborhood, has worked from home for six years. She said she's getting a lot of calls for tips from friends because many people are bewildered being out of their workday element. "A consultant friend of mine is a on his third day at home and said, 'I don't know how you do this.' He just can't imagine it. It's so different from working in a corporate environment."

Sure, there are plenty of perks to working from home — comfy slippers replace shoes, you don't worry too much about your wardrobe and the snacks are far better than the office vending machine. But this is not a license to go feral. Get out of your PJs. Shower. Put on clothes. Comfy is fine. "I'm on a lot of video conference calls, so I do make sure I look pretty good from the waist up," Lannon said.

To help the uninitiated, we spoke to four veteran WFH Chicagoans for their insights on how to adjust.

Make it comfortable

Even if working from home is temporary, consider an inexpensive mobile desk. The Edge Desk is only \$399, and a vast improvement over the ergonomic nightmare of working at the kitchen table. If you don't want to splurge for an office chair, at least make your current seating comfortable. Analyst Kylee Magno, who lives in Lakeview and has worked from home for 18 years, tricked out her chair with back support so she sits up straight and uses a gel seat. Tempur-Pedic makes a highly rated one for \$62.

Surround yourself with what makes you happy

Lannon has fresh flowers on her desk weekly, and when she has to do a lot of writing and creating, she lights incense to relax. Magno uses an essential oil diffuser and has a foot massager at her desk. "You can make it a nice environment," she said.

Splurge on nicer beverages or good lunches for yourself since office mates aren't going to steal your food. (Well, maybe the kids will.) Treat yourself to a pretty water bottle to stay hydrated. Rise from Fressko has a fruit infuser, so, like you, it multitasks. And now that coffee shops are mostly closed, step up your coffee game and make barista-style coffee with Breville's Bambino Plus.

Get better tech

Sharon Angelus, a web analyst in Woodridge who has worked from home for about 10 years, said having bigger monitors and higher internet speeds are a must. She also uses an external hard drive for backing up data; Seagate has a version with 2 terabytes of space for about \$90. Cloud-based data backups are another option, and many WFH vets use both.

Jason Patterson of Bucktown works in software and has had a home office for four years. He said better routers, such as Google Nest's Router, and Wi-Fi extenders are critical. "Home connectivity is extremely important because you're not going to be at your desk all day. You'll probably walk around the house to take a call and you might work on the internet in a different part of the house."

For noise, from the loud neighbor to the everyone's favorite, the sound of a jackhammer on the street, Patterson swears by noise-cancelling headphones. Look into a wireless set that also has Bluetooth capabilities for phone calls, like the ones from JLab Audio.

Control your day

Part of working from an office is camaraderie, and working from home means no water cooler chitchat. While sometimes that break is good, other times it can be distracting, especially when you're trying to get work done. Lannon said she uses timers to stay on task. "If I'm feeling overwhelmed and can't get going, I tell myself, I'm just going to do this for 15 minutes and it helps," she said, adding that timers also keep track of how she's using her time. She also sets reminders to get up and stretch.

Enjoy multitasking

The No. 1 perk of being at home is the ability to do laundry, cook and perform other home tasks. Magno said sometimes she pops on a face mask in the middle of the day. “Not only does it lift my spirits, but it lifts my eyelids,” she said, joking. “The only downside is if you get that unexpected package and the UPS man sees you.”